Sajhedari Bikaas Project
Partnership for Local Development

Quarterly Conflict Assessment

(August 2015)

Youth Engagement in Local Development Initiatives in Selected Districts in Mid and Far West Nepal

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Assessment conducted by Saferworld for the Sajhedari Bikaas Project
(Under Contract no. AID-367-C-13-00003)

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Introduction

This report summarises key findings from the seventh quarterly conflict assessment, carried out by Saferworld within the framework of the Sajhedari Bikaas project.

The project, which is carried out by Pact and funded by USAID, aims to improve the ability of targeted communities in six districts in the Far West and Mid-West regions of Nepal to direct local development. It does this by establishing and improving an enabling environment for community development; improving communities' ability to access resources for development; improving communities' ability to effectively implement inclusive development projects; and increasing the ability of existing and new government units to function effectively.

Existing and emerging conflicts have the potential to become an obstacle to community development, inclusive and accountable decision-making, and improved governance. At the same time, the programme aims to specifically promote community mediation mechanisms to reduce or prevent conflicts. Thus, Pact found it crucial to get regular assessments of conflict issues in the target districts during the programme.

The research for this assessment was carried out in three districts of Nepal: Kailali (Far West), and Banke and Surkhet (Mid-West). For this research, 16 key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with representatives from the administration, civil society, business community, journalists, and others well placed to comment on the topic. Fifteen group discussions (GDs) were also held with representatives from local communities and youth, mainly at the district level (see Annex 1, Methodology). As the findings are based on qualitative research, they reflect the perceptions and opinions of those consulted; many of the findings would benefit from more in-depth analysis, as the assessment was only able to touch upon them rather than exploring these issues in detail.

Field research took place on 23-29 April 2015; this was a period when a major earthquake struck Nepal affecting several districts. Although the districts where the research was being conducted were not badly affected, the tremors were felt by the research teams. The research team comprised of four members, all of whom had homes in Kathmandu—one of the hard hit districts. Of the four, the ancestral home of one of the researchers was destroyed by the earthquake. Upon learning about the safety of their loved ones, all members of the research team persevered and completed the field work. A few interviews in Kailali were cancelled as a result and many of the respondents talked more about the earthquake during interviews as it had a national impact.

An executive summary at the start of the report outlines key findings from the districts, highlighting the main commonalities and differences between the locations researched. This is followed by a background into why the topic is of significance in the current district. That is then followed by district-specific chapters that cover key issues. The report concludes with some recommendations for Sajhedari Bikaas on key issues and priorities to consider in the upcoming project phases. A list of acronyms can be found at the end of the draft report. The methodology, final versions of tools, and guiding questions used can be found in the annexes.

Contents

Acronyms

CA	Constituent Assembly
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist
DDC	District Development Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INGO	International Non-governmental organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PRT	Participatory Research Technique
RPPN	Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
UCPN(M)	Unified Communist Part of Nepal (Maoists)
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizen Forum
YCL	Young Communist League (YCL)
YF	Youth Force

Executive summary of findings

Unemployment, idleness resulting in deviant behaviour

Several respondents alluded to the adage "An empty mind is the devil's workshop," to illustrate the unemployment, idleness and the resulting deviant behaviour amongst youth.[1] There was noted widespread unemployment amongst youth in all three districts. There was uniformity about the perception regarding how unemployment and resulting idleness was triggering deviant behaviour amongst youth. As highlighted by several respondents in all the three districts, the lack of gainful employment opportunities was rendering youth to remain idle and making them more prone to engage in deviant behaviour. Respondents noted that while many were simply wandering aimlessly in their vicinity, others were resorting to gambling, crime, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

Societal lack of faith in youth

Another factor that came up repeatedly in all three districts was that there was a huge inter-generational gap between the youth and the older generation. Although there was a great tendency in the society to be rhetorical about harnessing youth's energy and potential and putting it to development of the country, the interplay appeared different in pronouncements and practice. While the youth were generally more educated and technologically savvy than their parents, the parents usually viewed the youth as impulsive, immature, and reckless. Similar perceptions were prevalent in the society which served as a significant barrier for the youth to surmount. As a result of this, respondents believed youth were generally excluded from many of the decision-making processes and opportunities owing to their age and lack of experience. This negative outlook towards youth reportedly was actually spurring disinterest amongst the youth to participate in development initiatives in the district.[2]

Growing disenchantment with politics, yet an alignment/attachment compulsion

Youth have been in the frontlines of all political movements and activities in the past. According to various respondents, youth today are reportedly less interested in politics in all three districts.[3] The political wrangling between the major political forces that has stalled the promulgation of the constitution has frustrated the youth in the districts surveyed. Also, the youth feel exploited and abandoned by political leaders. Most youth expressed that the political party and leaders only use them when needed for their own political purposes and

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[1] KII with civil society, man, Banke, 28/04/2015; FDG with community members, men and women, Kailali, 26/04/2015;

[2] FGD with youth, women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 26/04/2015;
KII with civil society, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

[3] KII with civil society, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Banke, 29/04/2015; FGD with men youth, Kailali,25/04/2015; KII with youth leader, man, Banke, 28/04/2015

promise them rewards.[4] Upon achieving their objective, however, they reportedly renege on their promises and abandon the youth. Similarly, the youth felt their prospects in politics were frustrated by the older generation of leaders that were bent on retaining their place at the helm and not allowing upward mobility of the youth.

Despite the growing disenchantment amongst youth, however, there was also a resignation amongst youth that they had little option but to remain aligned and attached with the political forces. This attachment to political parties was mainly due to the lack of better alternatives. They maintained their relationship with political parties for their own personal benefits and not because they had faith in the parties or were wed to ideologies they espoused.[5] The primary reason was for future employment possibilities because political parties have good access to both the local and central government.[6] The unemployed and idle youth also engaged in political activities because they had plenty of time at hand and would receive some level of remuneration in the form of cash, food, or fuel for their motor bikes or other forms for their participation, which to them was better than remaining idle.

Increasing migration trend

There is rising trend amongst youth to migrate to various foreign destinations for employment purposes. Many families in these districts had been going to India for employment for generations and that trend persisted even today. As the cost of crossing the border to India was relatively low with no documentation or middle men to pay off, it was an accessible option for all. However, there was a reported rising trend to now go to various destinations in the gulf like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Kuwait, and also to Malaysia. This exodus is said to stem both from the critical need as well as a fad amongst youth. While many were headed out because of the lack of employment opportunities, others migrated because they were simply just following others. Families too were said to be more inclined to assist youth to migrate to foreign destinations. As a result of migration, in many areas of these three districts youth were conspicuously absent. Due to the growing migration amongst youth, only older men, women and children remained in the many villages.

Exponential rise in the use of mobile devices and social media

The use of mobile devices and social media has risen significantly in the last couple of years. Youth in particular are attracted to gadgets and social media more than any other age group. The mobile phones serve multiple purposes for the youth: to surf the internet, watch movies and photos, listen to music and play mobile games. Although the use of mobiles and social media contributes to their overall awareness and connections, it was also identified by respondents as fostering deviance. Education of the youth is said to be affected by the excessive usage of mobile devices and social media. Both youth and non-youth (particularly the older generation) believe that they are so engrossed in it that they accord little time to

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[4] FGD with youth, men, Banke, 27/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Kailali,25/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Kailali,26/04/2015;
[5] KII with youth leader, woman, Banke, 28/04/2015; KII with youth leader, woman, Surkhet, 28/04/2015;
[6] FGD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 26/04/2015

their educational commitments. Using the veil of anonymity, youth were said to engage in illicit and illegal activities, such as harassing and threatening others, particularly young women through text messaging and over social media. Furthermore, mobiles and social media are reportedly abetting youth to commit criminal activities as it facilitates communication and coordination quicker and the possibilities of anonymity by hiding one's original identity is higher with technology and social media. [7]

Context background

Peace in Nepal is heavily dependent on community involvement in, and ownership of, the peace process, and youth are critical actors for motivating Nepali communities to participate positively in efforts to establish an enduring peace. At a time when government structures seem ineffective or nonexistent, mobilizing youth on behalf of their communities can bring their positive energy to the process.[8] Nepal's youth currently account for almost 40% of the country's total population, which includes the age group of 16-40 as articulated in the National Youth Policy (2010).[9] Further disaggregation shows that the population of age groups between 0 and 14 years is 34.6% (male 5,177,264/female 4,983,864), and that between 15 and 64 is at 61.1% (male 8,607,338/female 9,344,537).[10] This data on the surface hints that youth would be involved in many development activities, especially at the local level. In terms of employment, however, 38% of youth are currently unemployed and 400,000 are entering the Nepali labor market every year, based on Ministry of Youth and Sports data.[11] Various research studies show that such discrepancies in the youth population and their employment status can lead to risks of tension and criminality amongst youth.[12] Previous Sajhedari Bikaas assessments and other research reports[13] suggest that youth are often perceived as the perpetrators of crime and are thought to be involved in armed violence.

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[7] USAID Sajhedari Bikaas Quarterly Conflict Assessment: Attitudes and behaviour of young men towards and linked to sexual harassment in Nepal's Far West and Mid-West Regions' (May 2014), conducted by Saferworld

[8] USAID/OTI Nepal success story - Mobilizing youth for local development initiatives in the Terai, based on US Agency for International Development report, sourced from: http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/usaidoti-nepal-success-story-mobilizing-youth-local-development-initiatives-terai, 26 February 2015

[9] The total population of 16 – 40 age group in Nepal is currently 38.8% of the total population; based on 2011 Nepal Census data available on www.cbs.gov.np

[10] According to the 2011 Nepal Census data, sourced from: *www.cbs.gov.np*

[11] Social Transformation in Nepal: A Personal Reflection, a paper presented at a high-level dialogue on "Transformation for Peace," organized by General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) on July 8-9, 2010 at Nagarkot.

[12] USAID Sajhedari Bikaas Rapid Conflict Assessment in selected districts of Mid and Far West Nepal, March 2013; 1st Quarterly Conflict Assessment, 2nd Quarterly Conflict Assessment and 5th Quarterly Conflict Assessment, submitted to USAID (May 2013 –November2014), conducted by Saferworld within the framework of the Sajhedari Bikaas project; Impunity and Political Accountability in Nepal (February 2014), The Asia Foundation, Nepal

[13] http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/NEP_CA_Jan12_Youth%20and%20Peacebuilding.pdf, accessed on 26th Feb 2015

Nevertheless, there are many instances where report findings[14] have suggested that youth are also largely seen as contributing positively towards the political, social, and community development. Youth are particularly seen as change agents in politics as they are often found carrying out political activities at the local and regional level. Political actors are often found to be employing the services of youth to carry out their political activities, especially during political rallies, strikes, and, in many cases, political violence. These modes of employment for political purposes are viewed negatively as well, often thought to have caused young men and women to suffer from direct violence, to lose out on educational and vocational opportunities, and internal displacement.[15] According to a recent study conducted by Saferworld,[16] these threats coupled with high rates of under-employment and weak governance have led to many youth - both men and women - opting to find overseas employment as laborers, mainly in India, Gulf countries, Malaysia, South Korea, and Israel.

In terms of local development, there have been strong examples of youth-led initiatives, especially at the community level. For instance, in a recent Saferworld report[17] local youth from Sunsari and Sankhuwasabha were found to be more active in their local development initiatives than was perceived by the communities in which they resided. They were found to be taking community development initiatives through activities such as road construction, provision of drinking water within their community, volunteering in cultural activities, organising blood donation campaigns, and in one case even taking leadership of the community forestry user group. Examples of youth-led community development can also be witnessed through the formation and mobilization of a number of youth clubs that are present in most parts of Sajhedari Bikaas districts. Despite these examples of involvement, the overall perception towards youth is largely based on their unemployment status and their political involvement, both of which cause a negative outlook.

This assessment seeks to mainly explore the current context of youth involvement in local development within their community setting, which includes identification of existing challenges and opportunities for youth, the push and pull factors for their engagement, and an account of any best practices of youth engagement in local development initiatives. For the purpose of this research 'local development initiatives' include political, social, and economic development interventions at the community level, which have been carried out by both state and non-state actors, the latter of which include non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations/associations/clubs, and private sector.

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[14] Sajhedari Bikaas Quarterly Conflict Assessments (May 2013 – November 2014), conducted by Saferworld
[15] USAID Sajhedari Bikaas Rapid Conflict Assessment in selected districts of Mid and Far West Nepal (March 2013); Sajhedari Bikaas First and Second Quarterly Conflict Assessments (2013), conducted by Saferworld within the framework of the Sajhedari Bikaas project;
http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/NEP_CA_Jan12_Youth%20and%20Peacebuilding.pdf, accessed on 26th Feb 2015
[16] USAID Sajhedari Bikaas Fifth Quarterly Conflict Assessment: The Social Impacts of Migration in Nepal, (November 2014), conducted by Saferworld, internal report
[17] "How can you be a *marda* if you beat your wife?": Notions of Masculinities and Violence in Eastern Nepal (July 2014), Saferworld

District Findings

BANKE

Status of Youth

Youth in general are not economically independent and they do not have capacity to sustain their lives by themselves and are mostly reliant on their parents.[18] This is mainly due to widespread unemployment. The level of unemployment was illustrated by a respondent who asserted that if five vacancies were announced in the district, there were usually 5,000 applications for these positions.[19] As a result of high levels of unemployment, there is an increasing trend amongst youth in Banke to opt for labour migration. As a result of the migration phenomenon, youth are conspicuously absent in many of the villages. Unemployed youth in the district are mostly seen playing card games or carom-board.[20] Reportedly, parents do not respect the voices and interest of youth.[21] They see their children as immature and as minor all the time. This was reportedly leading to frustration and depression among youth. Drug and alcohol consumption was cited as a major problem amongst youth in Banke by a majority of the respondents. Mostly male youth attending (10+2) colleges are seen as abusing drugs,[22] however, in recent times there has been a marked increase of young women abusing drugs. The prevalent perception is that the rise in drug trafficking is mainly attributed to the unregulated open border, weak law enforcement, and the nexus between the drug peddlers and authorities in the district.[23] Drug induced crime too was reported as a corollary. Peer pressure and lack of/limited parental supervision and guidance of youth were reported as the reasons for this delinquency.[24] Youth clubs are rife in Banke. While some are engaged in social activities, others are mainly involved in sports competition. Many youth are working in

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[18] Saferworld's analysis is that most youth are unemployed and have no source of income leaving them reliant on their parents. All over Nepal, in most cases, parents pay for the education of their kids; very few youth work to generate income during their academic years. They live with the parents in most cases and their subsistence is dependent on their parents.

[19] KII with business community, man, Banke, 28/04/2015

[20] Carom is a board is a popular board game in South-Asia. It is a strike and pocket game similar to billiard or snooker. In this game, a flat circular disc made of wood or hardened plastic size of a large coin are pocketed using a similar disc of slightly larger size. Fingers are used to strike the discs. Up to four players can play this game at one given time.

[21] FGD with youth, men, Banke, 28/04/2015

[22] The drugs reportedly used are marijuana and prescription drugs that are available in pharmacies. There was reportedly limited use of hashish and cocaine as they were more expensive. Youth reportedly slipped across the border to procure these prescription drugs. After procuring it, they apparently consume it there and return back.

[23] FGD with community members, menmenwomenmen and women, Banke, 27/04/2015

[24] KII with civil society, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015)

the NGO sector and many are participating in NGO-led activities. Reportedly, many youth gangs[25] are also mushrooming throughout the district.

Youth and governance

Aside from the youth affiliated with political parties, other youth respondents had little information or interest in issues pertaining to development and local governance.[26] The majority of the Youth who were unaffiliated with political parties expressed how frustrated they were due to the lack of proper information regarding how they can contribute in such processes.[27] They also felt that all of these activities were monopolized by those affiliated with larger political parties and they were simply interested in benefitting personally from these engagements rather than doing actual developmental works.[28] Essentially, a lack of accountability and transparency may be due to the absence of locally elected bodies, leading to a further detachment between youth and governance structure and processes.[29]

Unemployment was regarded as the primary challenge faced by youth. However, since the development efforts and the budget allocations at the local level did not correspond with the youth's concerns and priorities, it has further alienated youth from the governance processes.[30] While many continue to migrate to other countries for employment opportunities, many have returned back after spending years abroad. Even returnees find it difficult to connect and contribute to the local level development initiatives, because they are still unaware of how to move forward. While some are unaware, others are bitter because governance structures were unavailing to their needs then and continued to remain so even upon their return. There was no indication from respondents of returnees engaging in political parties.

Marginalized and vulnerable youth

Marginalized youth reportedly had less access to information and opportunities in the district. Both marginalized youth and other respondents expressed that marginalized youth are mired in a vicious cycle due to low levels of education, which in turn poses a barrier to upward

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[25] Youth gangs was used at the local level to connote a group of individuals, mainly men that congregated frequently and indulged in anti-social activities such as drinking, gambling and drug abuse. However, the terms gangs were implied in reference to the physical and sometimes organised fights these separate groups were involved in. This was in not in reference to an organised criminal syndicate involved in sophisticated crimes.

[26] A majority of the respondents believe that those interested and engaged in issues of local governance were in one way or the other affiliated with a political party. Only those with affiliation had better access. As a resulted the rest were resigned to the idea that only with political affiliation and contacts could one be better connected to the development and governance issues.

[27] FGD with youth, men, Banke, 27/04/2015, FGD with youth, women, Banke, 28/04/2015

[28] FGD with youth, men, Banke, 29/04/2015

[29] Drawing from the narration of the youth respondents on how a majority of the decisions on local governance issues were made by a small coterie of political party representatives, it was evident that the lack of local elections had an impact on their interest due to lack of transparency and accountability.

[30] KII with youth leader, man, Banke, 28/04/2015

social mobility and access. Some government entities—particularly District Development Committees (DDC) and Village Development Committees (VDC)—and various organizations such as International Non-governmental Organizations (INGO) and NGOs, however, were attempting to uplift the marginalized communities from their current predicament. To some extent, through either allocation of budgets to these communities or through skill trainings, there were some efforts underway in the district to empower these communities. An example of this effort was skill training programs to emancipated bonded women labourers (*Mukta Kamaiya*).[31]

Drawing from the responses of the respondents, it can be inferred that despite such efforts to empower marginalized communities, what is sorely lacking is the recognition that female youth also fall in the vulnerable category. Women youth in the district are recognized as having various family and societal restrictions. According to one respondent, young girls are married at an early age in the villages, most of them before they reach 21 years of age.[32] Reportedly, cases of child marriage are high amongst Madheshi and Muslim community in Banke. As a result of early marriages, young women are seen as deprived of their right to pursue their ambitions and rather compelled to do chores revolving around the household and to bear children at an early age.[33] Following child birth, women are socio-culturally compelled to tend to the infant(s) and as a result, many of them are deprived of experiencing youth in their life because they reportedly enter full grown adulthood from being a child and miss out of the youth experience in the middle.[34] This makes it difficult for female youth to engage in local governance and development processes and/or find opportunities where they can meaningfully participate.

Politics and youth

Youth in the surveyed districts are increasingly becoming disillusioned with politics because it is not meeting their desired expectations. Many youth voiced that political parties tend to exploit youth to advance their political agendas; youth are then often abandoned by parties after those agendas are achieved/completed.[35] Despite this sentiment, there was still an inclination amongst youth to remain affiliated to political parties, because they yielded opportunities not readily available elsewhere. For youth, political affiliation somehow guaranteed greater opportunities. Platforms to enter leadership-level positions in politics, employment opportunities in government agencies, opportunities for furthering their sports ambitions and entering the NGO sector can reportedly be achieved if one has political

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[31] KII with government authority, woman, Banke, 28/04/2015
[32] Ibid
[33] KII with youth leader, man, Banke, 28/04/2015
[34] Ibid
[35] FGD with youth, women, Banke, 28/04/2015

connections.[36] Therefore, in order to obtain employment, most of the youth are drawn towards politics.

Despite the growing disillusionment amongst youth in Banke, a positive indication was reportedly that many youth were being allowed prominent roles within the party hierarchy. Reportedly, now there is a growing trend amongst major political parties such as the Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), Unified Communist Part of Nepal (Maoists) [UCPN(M)], and Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPPN) to delegate major roles to the youth politicians in Banke district.[37]

Youth and technology

Technology—particularly social media and mobile phones—has been woven into the lives of local youth. The usage is reportedly increasing at a rapid rate as more and more youth users seek access to these gadgets and internet service. Reportedly, the type of usage is contingent upon the age of the user. Those between the ages of 12 and 18 are using their mobiles and surfing the internet to watch movies, play games, listen to music, and to connect with friends and to meet members of the opposite sex.[38] Watching pornographic content on the internet and using mobiles is reportedly high amongst youth below the age of 20 in Banke.

There were several ways in which technology and social media is adversely affecting the Banke youth. To begin with, local perceptions were that the education of youth was being hampered as they were spending too much time using social media and not enough time on their studies.[39] Likewise, chatting on Facebook and mobile devices was reportedly leading to a rise in extra-marital relationships. It was also breeding suspicion and mistrust amongst family members and relationships were being negatively affected.[40]

There were positive aspects of social media and technology identified by respondents as well. Reportedly, these tools are allowing youth to become reporters and made lives of reporters much easier because the information can be attained through the click of a few buttons on the computer or through text messages on the phone.[41] Likewise, a respondent highlighted how he was part of a campaign to raise some money to support the school he attended. Reportedly, using connections on Facebook, the campaign was able to raise NRs. 60,000 (approximately $600) for the school.[42] Mobiles and internet also served as tools to connect migrant youth with their families back in Nepal.

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[36] KII with government authority, woman, Banke, 28/04/2015; KII with government authority, man, Banke, 28/04/2015

[37] KII with youth leader, man, Banke, 28/04/2015

[38] KII with youth leader, woman, Banke, 28/04/2015

[39] FGD with community members, men and women, Banke, 27/04/2015

[40] KII with youth leader, man, Banke, 28/04/2015, FGD with youth, women, Banke, 28/04/2015

[41] KII with journalist, woman, Banke, 28/04/2015

[42] KII with youth leader, , Banke, 28/04/2015; KII with youth leader, man, Banke, 28/04/2015

Youth and conflict

Youth in Banke have been affected by the armed conflict in the past. Many joined the Maoists and fought against the state. Those who were not directly involved in the armed conflict, however, were affected in one way or the other, some as victims and others as witnesses. Although the memory of the conflict has slowly begun to fade from the minds of the youth, it has not been completely erased because of the recurring tensions and stalemate amongst the political forces in the country.[43] The regular shutdowns and other political activities also serve as a reminder of conflict for many of the youth.

Having endured the violent conflict, many youth believe that another bout of armed conflict of that scale is unlikely to recur. However, some respondents still believe that conflict is still a possibility given the widespread unemployment and unaddressed grievances of the youth, such as social exclusion particularly felt by the youth. Particularly, the high level of frustration amongst youth could serve as a trigger for conflict in the future. Likewise, the confiscation of land and private property of individuals by members of a faction recently split from UCPN (M) reportedly could spark tension and conflict as well.[44] Banke is home to a large Muslim population and there have been tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the past. Although there had been no such conflicts lately, the idea of another bout between Hindus and the Muslims still unsettles many in the district.

Likewise, the conflict also evokes the idea of gang fights between the youth gangs which reportedly is a common occurrence in Banke. These gangs are not formed on the basis of common religion, ideological beliefs, or values. Rather they are associations based on similar age groups. Youth from the same vicinity tended to congregate as well as those attending the same educational institutions are said to be most likely to form gangs. These gangs of youth reportedly fight over petty issues[45] rather than over entrenched grievances.

National Youth Policy

A majority of the respondents had never heard of the National Youth Policy. Those in the government who had heard of the policy provided little indication of their knowledge of what the policy entailed and how it was being implemented in the district.[46] These respondents simply pointed to the weak implementation of policies in Nepal and called for a more effective implementation at the local level and incorporation of the lessons derived from the implementation to revise and further refine the policy. One youth respondent, however, claimed that he had actually participated in the drafting process of the policy.[47] The

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[43] FGD with youth, men, Banke, 29/04/2015; FGD with youth, women, Banke, 27/14/2015
[44] KII with civil society, man, Banke, 28/04/2015
[45] Petty issues here refer to allegation of teasing/harassment of girls by a rival gang or following a drunken stupor over no issues. Someone staring at someone else could even spark a gang fight.
[46] KII with government authority, woman, Banke, 28/04/2015; KII with government authority, man, Banke, 28/04/2015
[47] FGD with youth, men, Banke, 27/04/2015

respondent stated that he had reservations in regards to the age limits of "in-between 16 and 40" set in the policy. The respondent pointed out that due to pervasive early marriage in Nepal there were many couples that were having children at a very young age. As a result, there was great likelihood of both the parents and the child falling under the youth category, which the respondent viewed as potentially problematic in the future.

KAILALI

Status of Youth

Respondents in the district categorized the youth in the district as employed, unemployed, and those pursuing education.[48] Those who are unemployed and those who are pursuing education reportedly made up most of youth in the district. Unemployment is endemic amongst youth like many other places in the country. Similarly, there is a trend amongst youth to migrate to India for employment opportunities. The youth in the rural parts of district are engaged in agriculture as they assist their families that are mostly subsistence farmers. However, youth express decreased interest in agriculture because they perceive agriculture to be belittling after having acquired some level of education.[49] Likewise, even the parents of the educated youth reportedly did not want their children to engage in agricultural activities; instead they wanted them to obtain office-based employment opportunities. There are reportedly a number of youth also engaged in NGO sector work. Sports too are a main attraction amongst youth in Kailali. Youth in Kailali, mainly in the urban areas, are keen on both playing and watching sports. They are reportedly even trying to build an international cricket stadium in Dhangadhi.[50] Drug abuse and alcoholism amongst youth is reportedly a major challenge in the district.

Youth and governance

A majority of the respondents felt that there is a huge gap between youth and government authorities in the district.[51] Due to a lack of transparency and accountability in governance at the local as well as at the national level, youth reportedly have little interest in governance. This is reportedly also because of the government's inability to provide employment opportunities for youth and to include them in decision making processes that affect their lives. At the local level, perceptions are that only those youth affiliated with political parties have access to information, resources, and individuals wielding influence, while the rest have no role in governance related issues and very limited access to the aforementioned

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[48] FGD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 26/04/2015
[49] Many of the respondents during the USAID Sajhedari Bikaas Sixth Quarterly Assessment had mentioned this in Kailali.
[50] KII with journalist, man, Kailali, 24/04/2015
[51] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015; FGD with youth, women, Kailali, 26/04/2015

variables.[52] The growing disenchantment reportedly is also due to the lack of local elected bodies. Currently, respondents observe that the local development process is monopolized by representatives of major political parties that are allegedly doing little to include youth in activities or allocate resources to empower youth. When it came to allocating resources for youth, respondents affirmed that only a small amount was set aside for youth and that too mostly for sports-related activities.[53] Furthermore, the majority of respondents perceived the economic condition and level of education to also influence the magnitude of youth engagement in local development initiatives.[54] Those with better socio-economic status were perceived to have more access to information and resources, and greater interest in development initiatives. Those from impoverished backgrounds were perceived to be less educated, have less access to information and resources, and less interest in development initiatives.

There were, however, some respondents who believe that youth are gaining a more prominent voice and role in governance-related issues and activities. Reportedly, youth now are actively involved in Ward Citizen Forums (WCF) and taking responsibility in the development works in their local vicinity.[55]

Marginalized and vulnerable youth

Equal opportunities for youth from marginalised groups are rare in Kailali. Due to the impoverished status, their focus is mainly on earning to survive. They are reportedly more at risk not simply due to the lack of opportunities, but also because of the risky nature of work they undertake to make a living.[56] Due to their dire situation, many youth from marginalized communities resort to any work that provides them a decent earning. Reportedly, many youth from the marginalized communities in Kailali quit their education early on and go to India to find employment.[57] Due to the inadequacies, the marginalized youth are more vulnerable because they are susceptible to frustration and depression. Reportedly, many youth from marginalized communities are resorting to alcohol and drugs for comfort. Addiction has also led many to resort to criminal activities, primarily robbery and burglary, to cater to their need for illicit drugs and alcohol.

Youth from marginalised communities are reportedly being prioritized by NGO and INGOs. They are obtaining skills-training and jobs as a result of the training. Reportedly, Dalit and Tharu youth from 18 to 25 years are benefitting from these trainings.[58]

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[52] FGD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 26/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015
[53] KII with Business sector, woman, Kailali, 26/04/2015
[54] FGD with youth, women, Kailali, 26/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015
[55] FGD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 24/04/2015
[56] Ibid
[57] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015
[58] KII with journalist, man, Kailali, 24/04/2015

Female youth are considered to be in a vulnerable position in Kailali. The family restrictions and societal norms reportedly restrict young women significantly. Although they are increasingly becoming more active and vocal, opportunities are still very limited. Young women are expected to be more involved in household chores and agricultural work. Furthermore, according to respondents, the Far West region's culture does not allow women to participate in development or cultural activities, as it confines women within four walls of their home, thereby discouraging women's participation.[59] However, the same respondents perceived that within the Tharu community, women are allowed to go out and participate in social activities, including cultural activities.[60]

Politics and youth

Reportedly, youth interest and participation in local politics has decreased significantly in comparison to the last couple of years.[61] One of the mentioned reasons is that youth groups affiliated to the political parties like the Young Communist League (YCL), Youth Force (YF), NC's Tarundal, and Tharuhat youth groups are reportedly inactive. Previously, they were reportedly very active and attracted a large number of youth but due to the political stagnation at the centre, it has affected the local politics as well. The distaste towards politics is directly attributed to the acts of political parties towards youth. Increasingly, the youth feel that they have been manipulated by the political parties. While the political parties use the youth in their pursuit of power, they seem to abandon them later on. The growing disenchantment with politics and political parties amongst youth is because of the defaulting on promises and assurances made by the political parties.[62]

Reportedly, youth involvement or attraction towards politics is tied to the widespread unemployment in the district.[63] While some youth become politically affiliated in order to obtain employment, others are more extractive. Since political activities generally tend to provide some level of remuneration in the form of cash, food, and drinks and often petrol for their motor bikes, youth become involved in the activities simply for the benefits they receive. They reportedly have no interest in the party's ideology or policy, but simply on what they receive from their involvement.[64] Involvement of women youth in politics is reportedly minimal mainly due to the culture in the Far West region that imposes various prohibitions on the women.[65]

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[59] FGD community members, men and women, Kailali, 24/04/2015; FGD with youth, women, Kailali, 26/04/2015

[60] FGD with youth, women, Kailali, 26/04/2015, KII with civil society, man, Kathmandu, 21/05/2015

[61] KII with civil society, man, Kathmandu, 21/05/2015

[62] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015 ; KII with civil society, man, Kathmandu, 21/05/2015

[63] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015; FGD with n youth, men, Kailali, 26/04/2015

[64] FGD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 24/04/2015

[65] This has been frequently mentioned as a primary inhibitor against women's involvement in several the previous assessments.

Youth and technology

Technology—mainly the usage of mobile phones, internet, and social media—is reportedly widespread amongst youth in the district. Increasingly even those from impoverished backgrounds reportedly have mobile phones.[66] Social media like Facebook and Twitter is popular amongst youth of Kailali. Unlike their parents, the youth are reportedly better versed and more informed due to the new technology and gadgets. However, most respondents in the district viewed the increased use of mobiles and social media from a negative viewpoint. Many felt that education of the youth was being severely hampered as a result of the mobile usage.[67] More hours are reportedly being spent on mobiles than on education. In extreme cases some were reportedly becoming so addicted that they dropped all other activities and were constantly using mobiles and on Facebook.[68] The other downside of mobiles was that they were being used to watch pornographic content and send lewd text messages to female youth, thereby increasing sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Reportedly, early marriage amongst youth was also attributed to youth connecting through social media, falling in love, and marrying at an early age. Vulnerability to human trafficking was also cited as a growing trend of social media usage. Respondents narrated cases of young women lured by traffickers using social media by first befriending them, later becoming more intimate and enticing them into accompanying the trafficker, and eventually trafficking the girl/woman.[69]

Youth and conflict

Youth in the district have been affected by the armed conflict in Nepal. Like many other districts, some youth directly participated in the conflict, as some joined the Maoists or the State security agencies and the rest were caught in between. The general sentiment amongst youth in the district was that the political parties have used youth in their agenda and instigated various conflicts.[70] Now, however, youth appeared to have learnt from the past experience. Reportedly, the political landscape of the district was calm and without any conflict since the November 2013 Constituent Assembly (CA) election. Some believed that even the identity related conflicts that had brought the district to the verge of a violent confrontation had fizzled to a great extent and overtime will not be a source of conflict in future.[71] They even point to the existence of a vibrant civil society that would mediate between the conflicting parties in case a conflict did arise.

Others, however, disagreed and felt that conflict in the future is still a possibility. The first argument made is the belief that the context is dominated by elements from outside Kailali

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[66] KII with civil society, man, Kathmandu, 21/05/2015; KII with business community, woman, Kailali, 24/04/2015
[67] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015
[68] FGD with youth, women, Kailali, 26/04/2015
[69] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015 ; KII with civil society, man, Kathmandu, 21/05/2015
[70] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015; FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 26/04/2015
[71] FGD with youth, men, Kailali, 25/04/2015

and they are referring to national-level politics.[72] Reportedly, youth in the district are directed and mobilized by actors from the centre.

National Youth Policy

Almost all of the youth in Kailali, as well as other respondents, reported being unaware of the National Youth Policy. They are unaware of how such a policy came into effect or how it was being implemented. Some respondents, despite their lack of knowledge about the policy, however, made some speculations. They presumed that it could be part of a government policy to provide employment for the youth.[73] The same respondents also presumed that this policy had not been implemented claiming that had it been implemented, they would have known about it.

SURKHET

Status of Youth

According to most respondents, there are high levels of unemployment amongst youth in Surkhet. As a result of unemployment, there is a growing trend amongst youth to migrate to foreign destinations, which include the Gulf countries, Malaysia, Israel, and India.[74] Drug abuse and alcoholism amongst youth is reportedly high. On a positive note, some respondents also highlighted that many youth are pursuing higher education.[75] Men youth in particular are keen in sports activities and are often engaged in sports competitions.[76] Women youth are drawn mainly towards the hospitality sector, largely working in the booming hotel industry in Birendranagar.[77] Youth respondents at the community level also mentioned that many youth are inclined towards joining the security agencies; some are even joining the security forces in India.[78] The NGO sector is also perceived as another draw for the youth where they are able to contribute to their personal development as well as community development.[79]

Youth and governance

There is a very limited intersection between youth and governance in Surkhet. At the municipality level, there is relatively more awareness and participation of youth compared to the VDC level. This is primarily attributed to the presence of influential political party representatives in the urban centres to which urban youth have more access. At the VDC level, lack of awareness and access is said to be prohibiting youth from participating in government-led initiatives. As narrated by a respondent, youth at the VDC level are totally

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[72] KII with Business sector, woman, Kailali, 26/04/2015

[73] FGD with community member, men and women, Kailali, 24/04/2015

[74] FDG with community members, men and women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015;

[75] Ibid; KII with civil society, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

[76] KII with government authority, man, Surkhet, 26/04/2015;

[77] KII with Business sector, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

[78] FDG with community members, men and women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015

[79] KII with civil society, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

unaware of the fact that the state is obliged to provide them with certain services and information on governance and local development. To a great extent, the apathy amongst youth reportedly stems from ignorance.[80]

Youth representation in forums related to governance and development is also restricted as a result of the lack of trust in them. Reportedly, despite willingness and interest of the youth, the society in general does not trust youth easily and excludes them from the local governance platforms, such as WCFs or VDC Councils.[81] Due to the lack of locally elected representatives, representatives of larger political parties are serving as substitutes. Therefore, governance priorities have reportedly been skewed to favour political parties' preferences rather than the needs of the youth. Therefore, issues related to governance are not a topic to those youth who are unaffiliated with political parties because they have limited access.[82]

There is further limitation for youth due to insufficient mechanisms to include them in different forums. For example, priority categories have been created to ensure inclusivity in different forums at the local level. Those categories include women, children, disabled, elderly, and marginalized communities, but youth is not a category included in the process. The only priority delegated to youth is the allocation of some amount of funds for sports activities.[83]

Marginalized and vulnerable youth

Female youth and those from the socially and economically deprived communities such as the Dalit communities are reportedly the most vulnerable in Surkhet.[84] Although women have been significantly empowered in recent times, there are still many restrictions for female youth. They might have access to education, but employment opportunities are reportedly very scarce for female youth. While some lamented their limited access to opportunities outside their homes, others accepted it as their fate to do household chores.[85] Gender inequalities emerging from patriarchal family and societal norms—such as discouraging women from earning an income and suspicion towards working women who are required to commute—are reportedly preventing female youth from acquiring employment opportunities outside their homes. This is best reflected by the low levels of women foreign migrants in the district. Although male youth venture out to foreign destinations, only a handful of female youth have reportedly pursued that option. Likewise, there is a tendency to marry off women at a young age immediately upon completion of high-school or college before they are able to establish themselves professionally and financially.[86]

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[80] KII with civil society, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015
[81] KII with youth leader, woman, Surkhet, 25/04/2015
[82] KII with government authority, man, Surkhet, 26/04/2015
[83] FDG with community members, men and women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015; KII with government authority, man, Surkhet, 26/04/2015
[84] FGD with youth, women, Surkhet, 24/04/2015
[85] Ibid; FDG with youth, women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015
[86] Ibid

Although the government's inclusive policies warranted the participation of marginalized sections of the communities in forums such as WCFs, the overall access and opportunities of these marginalized communities is reportedly very restricted. Except for a handful of individuals from these groups, most of them still lack access to services and in most times remain unaware of what is going on and available.[87]

Youth and politics

Politics has become an integral part of the Surkhet youth experience as many youth remain either affiliated with political parties or have been mobilized at various instances for political activities. As one respondent put it, "without youth it is not possible to move ahead for political parties as their activities required support of the youth in numbers." Likewise neither could youth progress without political backing, especially in regards to getting employment. Hence their relationship is akin to flesh and nail."[88] Other respondents too echoed similar sentiments of the symbiotic relationship between youth and political parties.

Youth are primarily engaged in political activities for several reasons, as articulated by respondents. First, there is widespread unemployment in Surkhet. Youth believe that by aligning with major political parties, they can obtain gainful employment opportunities while these political parties are in power.[89] Youth are also incentivized by the political leaders with employment opportunities. Since many of the youth are idle, they engage in political activities as a result of peer pressure as well. Since political parties pay a certain amount[90] to the local youth to engage in their activities such as protests and rallies, election campaigning and donation campaigns, the lure of some financial compensation draws the youth towards political activities. For this reason, youth change the affiliation of political parties for their personal benefit. Youth tend to gravitate towards the political force in power and those that dole out more financial remuneration. Since parties provide food, money and fuel for their motorbikes, youth mobilize for political activities. Most of them participate not because they believe in the ideology and principles espoused by the political parties, but because of the amenities they can gain in return.[91]

Youth and technology

The lure of technology and social media was high amongst youth in Surkhet. Primarily, youth were widely using mobile phones and Facebook was popular amongst them. It had almost become an integral part of the youth experience and identity. The use of technology is also reportedly contingent on the socio-economic status of the youth. While those from the urban areas have better access and knowledge of the latest technological gadgets, those from the rural areas relatively lag behind the urban youth on this front. Whereas the youth in the urban

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[87] Ibid

[88] KII with youth leader, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

[89] FDG with youth, men, Surkhet, 23/04/2015

[90] The payment could be made in cash, in the form of fuel for motorbikes, food and alcohol or other assurances.

[91] FGD with youth, women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015

areas of Surkhet were seen to be using touch-screen mobiles, the ones in the rural and remote areas were still using button version mobiles.[92] The lack of access to roads, electricity and phone network connections in VDCs such as Taranga contributed to less usage of such technology and media. They expressed interest to use them but were unable to do so due the remoteness of their VDC. Another factor that contributed to this was their inability to purchase relatively expensive phones given their increased poverty levels.

In general, there was generic use of technology and social media reportedly used to update oneself with what is going on, and as a tool to communicate with others and bridge the distance between those communicating. Youth were generally using Facebook to make new connections amongst themselves, but also to connect to new contacts. Youth were using the internet to do research and learn new ideas and skills as well. While some were using these tools positively by using it enhance knowledge on various topics mainly, others were misusing these tools. Various respondents asserted that the growing use of mobile phones and social media was resulting in an increased number of extra-marital relations and family break downs.[93] It was also increasing cases of gender based violence as the female youth in particular are prone to harassment in the form of lewd messages and pornographic content received.[94] Additionally, the youth were reportedly so engrossed in social media that it was hampering their studies as they tended to spend more time on social media than on their studies.[95] Many youth were also using their mobiles and the internet to view pornographic content.

Youth and conflict

Most of the youth interviewed had been directly or indirectly affected by the armed conflict. While some mentioned that they willingly joined the Maoist movement, others mentioned that they were forcefully recruited. While some fled to safer havens such as Kathmandu or across the border to India, others continued to live in fear of the conflicting parties. As a result of the armed conflict, many youth were found to be either physically or psychologically scarred. Having endured the conflict, many youth did not wish for a return to conflict. Many actually do not believe that there will be another armed conflict of that magnitude in the near future; they feel the country has learnt a big lesson of the devastating nature of armed conflict. Others, however, differed and asserted that the increasing gap between poor and rich, lack of economic development, and widespread unemployment could

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[92] Anecdotal evidence as observed by the Saferworld research team while conducting the interviews in Surkhet. Almost all the urban youth had touch-screen whereas the ones in the rural areas were still using touch button phones.

[93] KII with government authority, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015; FGD with youth, women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015; The perceptions were that mobiles were allowing youth to connect to other youth and communicate easily. That increased level of communication between the opposite sexes, reportedly is resulting in increased affairs. Many married couples too are perceived to have been affected by it and these extra-marital affairs is reportedly leading to divorces and family break downs.

[94] KII with government authority, man, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

[95] FGD with youth, women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015

still fuel another conflict in the future.[96] Some actually believe that the course of national level politics would be the determining factor as whatever decisions are made at the central level by large political parties will have local level ramifications.[97]

Despite some compelling arguments made in the prospects of conflict in the future, there is little indication to support those arguments. There were no incidents reported of youth congregating together to oppose the government. Neither was there any youth related violent activities reported by any of the respondents. Instead of confrontation with the state, due to the lack of opportunities and inclusivity, youth were opting out by going abroad or seeking alternatives on their own.

National Youth Policy

Most of those interviewed expressed that they had never heard of the National Youth Policy. The responses obtained from the various respondents indicated that even local authorities were unaware of provisions in the National Youth Policy and no significant activity in the district had been conducted as part of that policy. One youth respondent who claimed to know about the National Youth Policy, referred to the potential establishment of a Youth Bank to promote youth's involvement in local entrepreneurship by providing loans without conceding large collateral.[98] It was unclear whether or when the Youth Bank would be set-up or what processes would be adopted to reach out to both men and women youth.

Conclusion

The potential of youth in Nepal is immense. The potential of the youth to make a meaningful contribution to the society was somewhat reflected in the aftermath of the major earthquakes that struck the country in April and May 2015. Sensing the need of the hour, youth instinctively sprang into action across the country. While some formed their own groups, others joined in the relief efforts of other organized groups with zeal. The humanity and commitment displayed by the youth in the post-earthquake setting is in many ways telling of the potential youth possessed. These youth are comprised of disparate groups as well as those serving in the various security agencies. It was both the vigour and brawn of the youth that came in handy in a time of national crisis.

Despite the remarkable display of courage, commitment, and capability during a time of crisis, youth continue to be afflicted by several vulnerabilities. Primarily, the perception of the family and society towards youth is marked to a great extent by distrust in their abilities and disapproval of their ways. Although the rhetoric of harnessing youth potential is a jargon frequently heard, in practice things are to the contrary. The negative outlook that tends to label youth as immature, inexperienced, and impulsive continues to serve to discourage youth. Therefore, despite the desires and aspirations to make a meaningful contribution by

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[96] KII with business sector, men, Surkhet, 25/04/2015
[97] FGD with women youth, women, Surkhet, 23/04/2015
[98] KII with youth leader, woman, Surkhet, 25/04/2015

excelling in the domain of personal and professional interest, their hopes and efforts are primarily dampened by the mistrust and negative outlook towards them.

As a consequence of this mistrust, youth are less involved in development initiatives. The lack of information and awareness about their role in such initiatives also serves as a significant barrier against their involvement. The lack of locally elected bodies has resulted in a coterie of representatives of large political parties at the local level responsible of local development. Allegedly, they only involve those affiliated to them and exclude the rest thereby erecting further barriers against the involvement of the youth. Also, since the existing structures don't prioritize "youth" as a category, there are limited mechanisms to accommodate their voices, thereby further alienating them from development initiatives.

Notably, however, there is a great disconnect between the family and societal mistrust and the support the youth receive in regards to foreign labour migration. Due to widespread unemployment, youth are going to various destinations around the globe in pursuit of employment opportunities in large numbers. In most cases, their pursuit to go abroad is supported by the families. The family bestows an enormous amount of trust by dispensing the finances required for them to go abroad irrespective of their age or experience. They are, however, reluctant to provide youth the same amount if it was requested for a national level venture. Even the societal norms tend to encourage migration by applauding the returnees that have returned with a handsome dividend.

The societal norms that at least encourage migration of men youth are quite prohibitive for the female youth. Women youth are more vulnerable than their male counterparts due to the lack of equal access to opportunities. There are limited opportunities to begin with, which is further constricted for women youth who are expected to stay home and attend to the household chores. This sentiment is more pronounced amongst certain communities in the Far West region of Nepal where traditions like *Chhaupadi*[99] still persist. While some women youth appeared resigned to this obligation, others expressed desires of opportunities beyond the house.

Finally, despite all the inadequacies and challenges, youth today have woven the variable of technology into their daily routine. Mostly, the use of mobile devices and social media is rife amongst youth. While some make good use of these available technologies, others misuse them, creating more vulnerability for themselves.

Recommendations

Employment opportunities and/or income generation schemes for youth

The overarching concern and aspiration of youth throughout the three districts was that of employment. Unemployment is endemic and it was labelled as the primary challenge

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[99] *Chhaupadi* is a tradition whereby a woman is housed in cow-sheds or a separate make-shift shelters outside the house during her menstrual cycle. The women are believed to be impure during the menstrual cycle; therefore, they are separated from the family members and the household.

afflicting youth today. Unemployment is compelling youth to migrate for employment purposes and resort to extreme measures such as crime and violence and putting themselves and even their families at risk by taking high-interest loans to pay off middlemen or companies facilitating employment opportunities abroad. Similarly, unemployment was attributed to the rise in alcoholism and drug abuse amongst youth. To reduce delinquency and vulnerabilities amongst youth, there is an exigent need to increase employment opportunities for youth. Donors too should be more focused on income generating schemes for youth as part of their commitment to help in Nepal's development process. The newly created opportunities need to be contextual, pragmatic, and compatible with the needs and interests of youth.

Entrepreneurial spirit of youth encouraged and supported

Entrepreneurial zeal amongst the youth was palpable. Their spirits and hopes, however, were mostly dampened by lack of encouragement and access to capital required to start up their ventures. Families are reportedly more inclined to fund the youth to obtain migration in any foreign destination but loath to providing the same amount to start up a venture in the local vicinity. Also, with little or no capital of their own, it was extremely cumbersome for these spirited youth to attain loans from the government or financial institutions. Even if they did somehow manage to acquire the needed capital, it came with high interest rates. Therefore, there is critical need to encourage and support the constructive entrepreneurial spirit of the youth. First, the encouragement should come from the families of the youth. Likewise, there is a need of government funded incentives to encourage and support youth mainly through their access to the needed capital for their ventures. This would not only uplift the spirits of these youth but would also serve as incentives for others youth to toe along the same line rather than veer off towards risky and unproductive activities.

Increased opportunities for female youth towards attaining gender parity

While youth in general are vulnerable, female youth are even more so as there are more restrictions and less opportunities for them. To a great extent culture also inhibits free movement of young women as it is almost a taboo in many of the Far West districts of Nepal for them to be seen doing anything other than household chores. Additionally, the tradition of early marriage particularly for women and *Chhaupadi* puts them at further health and SGBV risks. Since female youth constitute nearly an equal number as male youth, it is a priority to reduce the vulnerability of women youth alongside men youth. Particularly, while designing initiatives focused on empowering youth, a special emphasis needs to be given to ensure that young women also benefit from the initiative.

Likewise, many of the women empowerment initiatives aimed at uplifting women in the society end up perpetuating the gender norms and divides. It is particularly evident through the trainings imparted to the women. Men are generally imparted trainings in plumbing, electrical and electronics, masonry, carpentry which are regarded as being more masculine. By contrast, there are a limited number of trainings for women and they are provided trainings such as sewing and beautician which are regarded as being feminine. Women

candidates should be gradually included in all trainings and such discriminatory practices of trying to structurally discourage women should be discouraged. Instead, they should be proactively encouraged into taking these trainings. Such activities would be stepping stones in the pursuit to attain gender parity in Nepal.

Youth oriented awareness raising programs through social media and mobiles

Most youth expressed that they know little about what is going on with development activities in the district. Except for a selected few who had the interest or access as a result of certain affiliation (particularly to a political party), most of the youth were uninformed about their role and the role of governance. They need to be made aware of not just issues and activities related to governance and but also their responsibility towards the community. This includes awareness-raising on the merits and demerits of migration which is by far the most significant trend amongst youth today. This is most essential so that they are well endowed with the needed information prior to making at decision to migrate for employment or educational opportunities. They also know what to expect when they are in a foreign land and how to overcome some of the common challenges that they may encounter during their stay abroad. Since youth currently are heavily engrossed in social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, and use mobile phones widely, awareness-raising can be more effective if these youth preferred tools were used as a medium to get the necessary messages across.

Implementation of the National Youth Policy

The National Youth Policy of Nepal in itself is a holistic document that addresses the needed issues and priorities regarding the youth of Nepal. The categorization of youth, prioritization and vision underscored in the document succinctly reflects the context and need of the country. Despite such a comprehensive document, the implementation of the tenets enshrined in the document is still to come in practice. If the policy comes into effect through the prioritization of youth as agents of change in this country, many of the youth related challenges can be addressed. This should mainly be reflected through the acknowledgement of the needs and priorities of youth as a category, inclusion in the decision-making processes and through the allocation of budget to fund initiatives aimed at empowering them.

Annex: Methodology

To ensure consistency across Sajhedari Bikaas assessments, Saferworld applied the following methodological approach to data collection.

Stage 1 – **Desk Research, Review of Secondary Data** – To inform and complement the assessment, Saferworld reviewed secondary sources of information on current youth involvement in local development initiatives as well as explored their employment, migration, political and social affiliation, both focusing on Nepal to include in analysis and write-up.

Stage 2 – **Participatory Consultations and Research** – This was a key stage of data collection. This phase was rooted in a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach utilizing tools crucial to ensuring that the research is as participatory as possible given the various social and cultural factors that can be an obstacle to this. This phase was mainly taken place at the headquarters and VDC level in the identified three districts, where the research team had collected most of the data informing the research. In addition, some interviews were carried out with key informants in Kathmandu, for example with representatives of national authorities, organizations and associations working on youth-related issues.

Participatory Research Techniques (PRTs) applied included the following:

Kathmandu, District and VDC-level Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were considered the core category of interviews to provide district-specific information and qualitative data on youth in local development. KIIs will aim to elicit information from target respondents who are strategically placed to speak on the topic.

Approximately 4-8 KIIs were conducted in each of the target districts. Interviewees were from government institutions, private sector, local youth leaders, NGOs, INGOs, the media, and others well-placed to talk about youth issues.

Additional in-depth interviews were carried out with individuals who have specific views on or experiences related to youth participation in local development. These in-depth interviews were expected to provide a thick description of perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behavior that added depth to the assessment.

Group Discussions (GDs) with youth community representatives in all three target districts were conducted. Five GDs were carried out to provide qualitative data on a wide range of issues associated with youth and their involvement in local development initiatives. The group discussion was conducted with mixed-gender community groups, as well as separate GDs for both men and women youth representatives, belonging to different age groups.

Details of the exact GD composition were agreed upon during the early research stages.

District-level KIIs – A total of 6-8 KIIs were conducted at the district level, including respondents from different categories which included:

S.N.	KIIs at the district level	Quantity
1	NGO & INGO staff	2
2	Journalists	2
3	Government Authorities (LDO, WCO)	4
4	Local youth leaders	5
5	Private sector	3
	Total	16

Group discussions – A total of 15 group discussions were carried out, five per district. In each district, the GD compositions are broken down as follows:

S.N.	Group discussions (GDs)	Quantity
1	Community members (men and women)	3
2	Women youth group (18 – 25)	3
3	Men youth groups (18 – 25)	3
4	Women youth group (26-35)	3
5	Men youth group (26 – 35)	3
	Total	15

3. Research team

Three dedicated teams were involved in the research, one in each district:
- Three Saferworld staff members leading on methodology development, training, data collection, analysis and write up, and quality control;
- Three local researchers (1 per district) that support data collection and initial analysis.
- Two CeLLRd District Trainers (1 each for Surkhet and Kailali district) for coordination and observation

Three research teams comprising of three members each was involved in the field research. A Saferworld staff member led each group. The assessment was supported by senior Saferworld staff in Kathmandu and London, particularly during methodology development, analysis of findings, reviewing the initial draft report, and quality control. CeLLRd staff who participated in the recent conflict analysis and research training was also involved in this research as part of capacity building. They accompanied the research team to observe some of the KIIs interviews and GDs, as well as take detailed notes during the data collection process. They even undertook 1 – 2 interviews per district, under the supervision of the Saferworld staff member.

Key principles

Conflict and context sensitivity: Sajhedari is committed to implementing the principles of conflict sensitivity in its own work, and supporting other actors to operate in a manner that is conflict-sensitive. Thus, Sajhedari will apply the principle of conflict sensitivity throughout the methodology design, data collection, analysis and write-up. To do that, Sajhedari is, for example, transparent about the purpose of the research; involves respondents and researchers in a way that does not put them at risk; selects and designs questions in a way that will not

increase tensions, fuel stereotypes, etc.; and ensures confidentiality and anonymity of respondents at all times.

Inclusivity: Inclusivity is fundamental to Sajhedari's approach, and the views and perceptions of the most vulnerable groups in society (which often includes women, youth, elderly and minorities) are a key consideration for Sajhedari. While there are limitations in terms of how many representatives from vulnerable and marginalized groups can be involved, Sajhedari will aim to ensure a good understanding of the perceptions and specific concerns of those groups.

Gender balance: The research team will talk to both male and female respondents from different age groups, and strive to obtain nuanced viewpoints on the topic. However, the research team may not always be able to get balanced involvement of male and female respondents, and may also have to prioritize informants who are better informed about the relevant issues, even if fewer respondents from some groups are heard as a result.

Participatory methodology: The diverse views and perceptions of respondents were crucial to obtaining a good understanding of the current situation, potential developments and opportunities for programming responses. To get this information, participatory tools proved to be effective as they were suitable for obtaining rich qualitative data. Sajhedari has identified and employed a limited number of tools that are designed to extract good information on specific issues where appropriate.

Guiding Questions for KIIs and GDs

Youth in the District:
1. Can you tell us, how do the local youth spend their time on a day-to-day basis? (Probe on their daily routine and elucidate different responses based on gender, identity and age group)
2. In what areas are youth mostly involved? (Probe on political, social and economic areas as well as cultural; for instance, could be organising fairs/carnivals, health campaigns, sports activities, etc.)
3. Can you tell us about the current economic situation of the youth? (Probe on gender, identity, unemployment and age-group differences)
4. What is the role of social media and technology (mobile phones, smartphone, internet) on local youth? If there is a role, how are they using it and what is the impact?

Youth in Governance:
5. What are the major development activities taking place in your district/community in the past one year? Can you tell me the three most important ones?
6. Are there initiatives addressing youth concerns or engaging the youth in the district? (Probe on impact and ownership) Why, or why not?
7. In your opinion, how are youth playing a role in your local development? (Probe on gender and identity, as well as specific age group); Can you provide examples of their role? (Probe on specific details, positive and negative, and why)
8. Do their social and economic conditions affect their participation in local development? If yes, why and how? If no, why?
9. What attracts youth to participate in local activities? (Probe on gender, identity and age-group based factors and differences) (Probe on factors such as engagement in local

development; local governance mechanisms such as VDC, Health Post, etc.; involvement in community events and community-level activities)

10. What aspect of governance do youth consider to be most important? Why? (Probe on employment generation, participation in local government initiatives, decision-making)? Are such aspirations of the youth met or not? How would those aspirations be best fulfilled? What would be the consequences if they are not met?

11. Can you provide specific examples of interactions and engagement between youth and local government authorities? Do they engage/interact with local government provisions? Do they participate in the local government services? How can youth engage in that process?

12. In the absence of local elected bodies, how are youth playing a role in local governance?

13. Do youth hold decision-making capacities when it comes to development activities? (Probe on which gender and identity, age group, and how)

14. Are youth engaged with civil society organizations at local level/national level? How does this influence the youth's engagement with local authorities? Does this influence at all? Can you provide specific examples of such engagement/ interactions?

15. Can you tell us some of the local civil society (NGO and CBO) initiatives that have a youth focus or have been proactively engaging local youth? (Probe on gender, identity and age-group differences)

16. How can youth contribute to local economic development? If they are, can you provide specific examples? If not, why do you think it is so? (Probe on differences)

17. In your opinion, what is the intersection between youth and private sector? (Probe at local and national level)

18. Does the usage of social media and technology change the way youth participate in local development? If yes, how so and in which aspects of local development? (Probe on political, social and economic aspects and generate gender and identity-based differences)

19. Can you tell us some of the local civil society (NGO and CBO) initiatives that have a youth focus or have been proactively engaging local youth? (Probe on gender, identity and age-group differences)

20. What about youth belonging to marginalized communities? Do they have an equal platform to participate in local development? Are they involved in community/ district level activities? Do they hold decision-making positions?

21. Do you know of the existence of the National Youth Policy 2010? If yes, can you tell us what provisions are included?

22. What should be included in the National Youth Policy for the overall development of the youth in Nepal?

Youth mobilization and conflict:
23. What motivates youth? Through which kinds of activities do you see most youth mobilization?

24. What is the factor that unites youth? (based on previous response) What is the result of such unity? What are the consequences? (Probe on peace actors within their communities)

25. Are there any issues in the district that divide youth? Which groups stands at the opposite end of the spectrum? Why? What has this divide resulted in?

26. Are there any specific challenges that you can think of which do not allow youth to participate in local development? If so, what are these challenges? Does this have a potential to flare up and lead to unsavory consequences?

27. What do the youth think of conflict? Have the youth observed conflict? What do you understand by conflict? Who are involved and why? Have you been involved in conflict? Have you suffered from conflict? (Probe on youth involvement, gender, identity)

28. Are there any existing conflicts between local development authorities and the youth? Between older generations and the youth? Between political parties and the youth?
29. What is the intersection between youth and political parties? Is there any linkage to conflict in that intersection? (Probing on the actors involved and types of conflict)
30. What could be the way to mitigate such conflicts (Probing on placing conflict sensitive lens in development activities)
31. Do you think all types of youth participate in local governance? Are female youth also given equal opportunity to participate? Why, or why not? (Probe on examples) Could the exclusion result in conflict? If so, how and why?